

Workforce Development Board

Literacy Committee Minutes

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Attendance: via ZOOM

Attendees:

Jennifer Mauro – Goodwill Industries SNJ, Chair
Danielle Fithian – Goodwill Industries SNJ, Chair
Caren Freyer – PSEG
Anthony Phillips – Adult Basic Education/RCBC
Christopher Bound – Learning Link
Jesus Arestirado – One-Stop Operator

Jennifer Veneziani – Div. Voc. Rehab Svcs.
Rosy Wagner – Burl Co Library System
Jesse Pappler – Burl Co Institute of Technology
Kelly West – WDB
Barbara Weir – WDB

Call to Order 9:00AM – Jennifer Mauro, Chair

Today marks Theodor Geisel's birthday, better known to the world as Dr. Seuss. It is also Read Across America Week; how ironic we kick off the Literacy Committee. Literacy is crucial to the success of individuals in both their career aspirations and their quality of life.

Thank you to all who have joined our committee.

I. Introductions / Getting to Know You

Jennifer Mauro, VP of Employment and Training. Goodwill Industries of Southern New Jersey & Philadelphia's mission is to provide education, job training and career services that help individuals with disabilities and disadvantages get to work. The large-scale collection and sale of donated goods in Goodwill Industries of Southern New Jersey & Philadelphia's retail stores fund its job training programs and career services for people with disabilities and disadvantages.

Goodwill has a passion for literacy. The Board of Directors identifies literacy as one of the biggest gaps within their territory. There has been a significant decrease in funding over the course of years. The CEO and the Board of Directors really identify literacy as our primary goal for the organization, as it relates to this committee.

10 years ago, Goodwill of Southern NJ and Philadelphia was opened and started a program called Helms Academy*, High School Diploma Prep program. In 2013, Goodwill partnered with Burlington County College (now RCBC) to help adults who had not achieved a High School diploma. Through the Helms Academy, Goodwill has helped individuals achieve their goals by helping with test prep and by partnering with Burlington County College, Camden College, Ocean County College, etc. Colleges have helped many individuals who were able to receive 30 college credits which Goodwill paid for. Since then, Goodwill has expanded services to include ESL and digital literacy. Goodwill is here to supplement the overwhelming need to access these services in our territory. If all of us provided these services, we would still not meet the need that is out there right now.

Please Note: Goodwill's Helms Academy offers free basic adult education and courses and career services to adults 18 and older who want to earn their high school diploma. Thanks to partnerships with Camden County College, Drexel University, The Community College of Philadelphia, Ocean County College and others, participants can earn up to 30 college credits. Currently, Goodwill's Helms Academy operates locations in Maple Shade, NJ, Stratford, NJ, Toms River, NJ, North Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia.

Danielle Fithian, Director of Mission Services (job training programs & career services). The goal of all job training programs, and career services is to help individuals with disabilities and disadvantages prepare for and secure and retain competitive jobs in the workforce, such as job coaching, career readiness programs, life skills training, supported work, and diagnostic vocational evaluation. Her role is to make sure programs are expanded upon and running efficiently.

Currently, Goodwill operates training centers in New Jersey in Maple Shade, Pennsauken, Stratford, and Toms River. Multiple locations are also open in Philadelphia. Services offered include computer skills, light industrial, forklift certification, and CDL-B training.

Anthony, Adult Basic Education at Rowan College at Burlington County. Oversees team that provides approximately 8 weeks of High School Equivalency Prep. Partners with three organizations, Literacy Volunteers of Burlington County, Willingboro Adult School, and Bordentown High School to make up the Adult Basic Education Consortium. Together they help individuals explore job training, career options, and help improve literacy.

Caren, Regional Public Affairs Manager with PSEG. Vice President and Trustee of Roseville Charter School in Newark and retired Chairwoman of the Youth Investment Council and on the Workforce Board of both Newark and Essex Counties. She recently relocated Burlington to help PSEG with Construction Management. Caren is the current Youth Council chairperson.

Caren reported that PSEG has contributed to the Burlington County Library Event as well as other events this year. She, as well as PSEG, supports job development and literacy on every level, beginning at the Preschool level. PSEG developed coloring books working along with Sesame Street and Emergency Management to teach young children literacy skills, in the event of a power outage or other emergency, teaching them how to be better prepared. Thousands of coloring books have been distributed and they have even gone into classrooms with our program.

Jesse, Assistant Principal at BCIT. Oversees both secondary High School studies program and a post-secondary experience. Works with the post-secondary education to adults in Burlington County and surrounding areas to provide them with CTE training (Career Tech Education). BCIT trains individuals in the Allied Health Programs as well as other popular programs such as HVAC, Cosmetology, Welding, Carpentry, and others. The goal is to help individuals make a career choice, educated them, and try to bridge the gap to select a good career pathway. Literacy is an important part for all the pathways of a future career.

Jesus, Burlington County One-Stop Operator. Has been in the One-Stop Operator role since 2017. The One-Stop provides employment training services for those residence in need. Residents that qualify can apply for a grant for job certifications or licenses for in-demand careers. Individuals can also get help with tuition waivers to pay for college and help with employment services, such as Resume Guidance, Interview Skills, etc.

Rosy, Lifelong Learning with the Burlington County Library System. Expressed a sincere thanks to Caren and PSEG for their generous contribution to Bookfest at the County Library. Rosy's department primary focus on Digital Literacy, not specific to reading literacy. Individuals cannot do anything these days without basic digital skillset. For this reason, there is a team in place, which has been established for about 1 ½ years. They have decided to focus on digital literacy and now offer basic computer skill classes at all our libraries. The library also has a Mobile Learning Lab to give computer skill help or individual tech help at community centers. They also offer 1:1 appointments to work on a specific skill. The library is looking to expand resources to reach English language learners and in the future to the native English speakers.

Jen, Manager of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) for the Burlington office. Started out 21 years ago on the Literacy Committee, positioned in the Workforce Learning Link. Has always had the passion to work for DVRS.

Christopher, Learning Link Instructor. Has been the instructor since August 2021.

Kelly, WDB Director. Thanked everyone for joining the committee to assist the WDB's literacy initiative; cannot be done in a vacuum. Literacy is a skill that no one can be successful without. This includes digital literacy. Problems highlighted during covid when individuals could not move forward without digital skills.

Barbara, WDB Staff. Has been with the WDB since 1998. Fondly remembers creating coloring books for the WDB's Literacy Initiative. Thanked all participants for their collaboration.

II. **Literacy Committee Purpose & Duties/Responsibilities – Jenn**

The Literacy Committee helps coordinate local literacy resources, engage community stakeholders around local needs and priorities, and create a system of literacy supports in the Burlington County Workforce Development Area. The literacy committee is charged with developing a comprehensive system of supports for developing basic literacy skills for our residents.

Committee Duties & Responsibilities:

- Identify local and regional literacy needs.
- Identify how available literacy funds can support local and regional needs.
- Build capacity to address literacy needs that serve as barriers to employment or advancement.
- Ensure the integration of the Title II and other literacy services into the One Stop Career Center operations.
- Provide fiscal and programmatic oversight of the Title II and other literacy funding streams.
- Develop standards and priorities for the professional development of providers and staff regarding literacy services and needs.

III. **Literacy Needs Assessment** – Barbara

Burlington’s Literacy Needs Assessment mimics the assessment completed by Camden County, using 2021 Census Data, as well as data/information from the NJ Department of Education.

4 Key Identifiers

- 1) High School Graduation Rate
- 2) Percentage of People Below the Poverty Level
- 3) Percentage of Households Speak Languages Other than English
- 4) Percentage of Residents 25 years or older without a High School Diploma or Equivalent

Assessment data shows the towns above and below the national average, and what areas need extra support with literacy.

Please Note: The Assessment will be sent, with the minutes, for review and discussion at the next meeting.

IV. **Committee Discussion**

Kelly, Working on our Regional and Local Plans which will include Literacy, a digital literacy / digital equity / digital divide component. Job seekers are having a hard time with transportation; need to be able to get to and access our library, Learning Link, Job Center, our RCBC team. Information will be added to the plan, it is important to get any feedback and any information this committee wants to add. Our plans are a living document which can be edited and updated at any time. Kelly cannot emphasize enough how much people need literacy skills. A predominant factor and success of everyone moving forward is the foundational goals of digital, communication, and listening skills, as well as reading, writing, and math. Not having these skills is getting in the way of them getting to their goals.

Kelly noted the Department of Labor is trying to get rid of the Hi-set Test and wants to go back to the GED. Asked the committee for feedback:

Danielle, Chooses the HiSet over the GED because 95% of our students struggle with math and the Hi-set gave students the use of an on-line calculator. If they change from the Hi-Set to the GED, there will be a significant investment to transition to a testing facility. One requirement was the purchase of cameras to use during check-in and cameras in the ceiling to be used to proctor the test.

Kelly, The GED is a lot harder than taking any High School test. Employers should not snub a person because they have a GED because it is a lot harder to get. The retest and failure rate were astronomical with the GED.

Jenn, With the GED there is now a digital literacy component part because now you must be able to use a calculator on the screen to do the math portion.

Danielle, A lot of people of different age ranges coming in and they are not sure how to type an essay on the computer or use a calculator on the screen. This is challenging for those with no literacy skills. Using the HiSet, we give them calculators and take the time deep on showing them how to use them. I really believe it will be difficult to make the shift to the GED.

Rosy, Increased requests for High School Equivalency testing centers and it is out of the libraries price range. I have made it my mission to find testing centers especially ones that would test for free. I believe that if they make the change there will even be fewer testing centers. 50%-60% of the people we are helping are of the aging population.

Jenn, Cannot talk about literacy without talking about digital literacy. Whether you have your basic English skills or basic education skills, Educational, Language, and Digital are the 3 components needed to be economically sustainable. Individuals need digital skills to be able to operate a calculator, computer, and a cell phone.

Rosy, There is a big difference using a cell phone and using a computer. It can take about 15-20 mins to help someone with computer skills. There is a vocabulary among youth that is different between cell phones and reading literacy.

Caren, With an aging population and seeing more of those people having to go back to the workforce we are seeing a stronger need for digital literacy within that group and have no necessary computer skills. Part of our focus needs to be on the aging returning to work.

Barbara, Community Resource Navigator flyers will be sent out with the minutes and the assessment.

Rosy, The library has a partnership with Rutgers school of Social Work, to help people find resources and fill out applications.

Kelly, *What is BCIT seeing in Adult Tech and literacy needs?*

Jesse stated that literacy is the piece needed to have a strong foundation. They don't want to set those taking exams up for failure because they don't have their literacy skills up to par.

Anthony, Since the move from Willingboro to the Mount Laurel Campus increase in number of students; have 22 students. However, 18 of them are under the age of 24. Fewer older adults are not attending because they feel intimidated. RCBC is hoping to have another class to solve this issue.

V. **Next Steps** – Jenn

- Updates/Goals set from Learning Link
- Updates/Goals set from Adult Basic Education
- Discussion of Literacy Needs Assessment

Meeting Adjourned: 10:01 AM Motion 1st Anthony/ 2nd Caren

Next Meeting: May 4, 2023 – Hybrid (for those who cannot attend in person)

Meeting to be held at Goodwill Industries of Southern New Jersey & Philadelphia's Corp. Headquarters, 2835 Route 73 South, Maple Shade, NJ 08052 (not the retail store located in the Lowe's shopping center).